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APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.	CONFIRMATION NO.
10/506,717	09/07/2004	Takeo Yamaguchi	NAII123495	4853

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SEATTLE, WA 98101-2347

EXAMINER

CHU, HELEN OK

ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
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1745

MAIL DATE	DELIVERY MODE
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05/16/2007

PAPER

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

Office Action Summary

Application No.

10/506,717

Applicant(s)

YAMAGUCHI ET AL.

Examiner

Helen O. Chu

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-- The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address --

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) OR THIRTY (30) DAYS, WHICHEVER IS LONGER, FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136(a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133). Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

- 1) ☒ Responsive to communication(s) filed on 20 January 2005.
- 2a) ☐ This action is **FINAL**. 2b) ☒ This action is non-final.
- 3) ☐ Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle*, 1935 C.D. 11, 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

- 4) ☒ Claim(s) 1-27 is/are pending in the application.
- 4a) Of the above claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from consideration.
- 5) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.
- 6) ☒ Claim(s) 1-27 is/are rejected.
- 7) ☐ Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.
- 8) ☐ Claim(s) _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirement.

Application Papers

- 9) ☐ The specification is objected to by the Examiner.
- 10) ☐ The drawing(s) filed on _____ is/are: a) ☐ accepted or b) ☐ objected to by the Examiner.
Applicant may not request that any objection to the drawing(s) be held in abeyance. See 37 CFR 1.85(a).
Replacement drawing sheet(s) including the correction is required if the drawing(s) is objected to. See 37 CFR 1.121(d).
- 11) ☐ The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner. Note the attached Office Action or form PTO-152.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

- 12) ☐ Acknowledgment is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d) or (f).
- a) ☐ All b) ☐ Some * c) ☐ None of:
1. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.
 2. ☐ Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.
 3. ☐ Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

* See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

Attachment(s)

- 1) ☒ Notice of References Cited (PTO-892)
- 2) ☐ Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948)
- 3) ☒ Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO/SB/08)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date 9/7/04.
- 4) ☐ Interview Summary (PTO-413)
Paper No(s)/Mail Date. _____.
- 5) ☐ Notice of Informal Patent Application
- 6) ☐ Other: _____.

DETAILED ACTION

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 102

1. The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless –

(b) the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country or in public use or on sale in this country, more than one year prior to the date of application for patent in the United States.

2. Claims 1, 4, 6-9, 11-13, 14, 18, 22, 21 rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Takeo et al. (EP 1 202 365).

In regards to claims 1, 6-9, 11-13, the Takeo et al. reference discloses a direct methanol solid polymer fuel cell which comprises a porous (Figure 1 and 2) polyimide (Paragraph 17) electrolyte with two or more proton conductive monomers can be used to produce a co-polymer (Paragraph 23-25). The Takeo et al. discloses the porous substrate is swell resistant (Abstract) that is normalized 1.2 or less and 0.2 or more (Paragraph 26). Porous substrate undergoes pervaporation at 25 C.

In regards to claim 4, the Takeo et al. discloses a porous substrate with an average pore diameter to be 0.001 to 100.mu.m, the porosity to be between 10-95% and a thickness of 100.mu.m (Paragraph 4).

In regards to claim 14, 18, 21, 22, the Takeo et al. reference discloses a polyimide membrane where the pores are filled with proton conductive polymer where there is a step of heating and filling the pores (Paragraph 32). The membrane resists swelling (Abstract) and therefore, cannot be swollen with methanol or water.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 102/103

3. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(b) the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country or in public use or on sale in this country, more than one year prior to the date of application for patent in the United States.

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

4. Claims 5, 10, 24, 26, 27 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as anticipated by or, in the alternative, under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as obvious over Takeo et al. (EP 1 202 365).

5. In regards to claim 10, the proton conductivity of the electrolyte membrane 0.001S/cm and not higher than 10.0 S/cm at 25 C and 100% humidity is an inherent trait of the invention by Takeo et al, since the invention by Takeo et al. and the Applicants invention is the same. Further it is known in the art that proton conductivity of Nafion is approximately 7.8×10^{-2} S/cm. The Takeo et al. discloses that the proton conductivity of the invention is improved over Nafion (Paragraph 61) , therefore, it would be obvious that the proton conductivity of the invention by Takeo et al. is in the range of 0.001 S/cm and 10.0 S/cm. Please note that Paragraph 58 tested the invention in a mixture of water and methanol under its equilibrium vapor pressure or supersaturated state. Under the equilibrium vapor pressure incorporates 100% humidity.

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6. In regards to claim 24, 26, 27, the Takeo et al. reference discloses a fuel cell having a proton conductivity of between 0.001 S/cm to 10.0 S/cm at 25 degree Celsius in 100% humidity that is swelling resistant. Since the electrolyte membrane as disclosed by Takeo et al. is the same as invention of the Applicants, the intrinsic property of 0.01m²h/kg.mu.m to 10.0 m²h/kg.mu.m must also be the same.

It is noted that claims 5 and 8 are product-by-process claims. "Even though product-by-process claims are limited by and defined by the process, determination of patentability is based on the product itself. The patentability of a product does not depend on its method of production. If the product in the product-by-process claim is the same as or obvious from a product of the prior art, the claim is unpatentable even though the prior product was made by a different process." In re Thorpe, 777 F. 2d 695, 698, 227 USPQ 964, 966 (Fed. Cir. 1985). Since the electrolyte membrane is similar to that of the Applicant's invention, Applicant's process is not given patentable weight in this claim.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

7. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

8. Claims 2, 3, 15 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Takeo et al. (EP 1 202 365).

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In regards to claims 2 and 3, the Takeo et al. reference discloses polyimide or polyamide (Paragraph 23) used in the electrolyte but does not specify an aromatic polyimide or a polyamide. However, because homologs, analogs, and isomers in chemistry may create a prima facie case of obviousness. *In re Dillion* 16 USPQ 2d 1897, 1904 (Fed, Cir, 1990); *In re Payne* 203 USPQ 245 (CCPA 1979); *In re Mills* 126 USPQ 513 (CCPA 1960); *In re Henze* 85 USPQ 261 (CCPA 1950); *In re Hass* 60 USPQ 544 (CCPA 1944).

In regards to claim 15, the Takeo et al. reference discloses a step of heating the monomer to polymerize the monomer however, the Takeo et al. does not disclose repeating the same step again. In general the transposition of process steps or the splitting of one step into two, where the processes are substantially identical or equivalent in terms of function was held to be not patentably distinguish the processes. *Ex parte Rubin* 128 USPQ 159 (PO BDPatApp 1959).

9. Claims 16, 17, 19 and 20 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Takeo et al. (EP 1 202 365) in view of Yamaguchi et al. (JP 05-031343)

In regards to claims 16, 17, 19 and 20, the Takeo et al. reference discloses a step of plasma grafted polymerization that requires filling and heating the membrane but does not disclose the use of surfactants in the monomer solution, however, the Takeo et al. admitted that filling the pores of a membrane through plasma grafted polymerization is known to one of ordinary skill and can be found in the Yamagushi et al. reference. The Yamagushi et al. reference discloses plasma grafted (radical initiated which

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cross linked nitrogenous polyesters of polyimide (Column 1, Lines 20-25) which comprises 3,3',4,4-biphenyltetracarboxylic acid or a dianhydride (Column 4, Lines 59-62) and an oxydianiline (Column 5, Lines 25-30) The Brunner et al. reference also states that the polyimide composition is useful in impregnating or as an adhesive agent. Therefore, it would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill at the time the invention was made in incorporate the polyimide composition as disclosed by Brunner et al. into the polyimide porous structure to enhance impregnation for the porous membrane.

Conclusion


Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Helen O. Chu whose telephone number is (571) 272-5162. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday-Friday 8am-4:30pm.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, Patrick Ryan can be reached on (571) 272-1292. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

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Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system. Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

HOC


TRACY DOVE
PRIMARY EXAMINER
5/07